

A theology in dialogue

Henri-Jérôme Gagey, a former dean at the Catholic Institute of Paris, believes that in responding to the current “anthropological revolution”, theology needs to display “clinical responsibility”.



Where are the Congars, Lubacs, Journets and other great French thinkers who influenced 20th-century theology? Paradoxically, the post-conciliar period resulted in a loss of French theological influence.

This occurred to such an extent that ten years ago Dominican Luc-Thomas Somme, rector of the Catholic Institute of Toulouse, asked whether “the pulse of francophone theology is still beating”.

Although not denying the effects of a post-conciliar context that included fewer priests and less financing, several theologians have offered a quite different diagnosis.

The “heroic generation” of the pre-conciliar period certainly accomplished “a decisive task”, e.g. in addressing the challenges of the rationalist tradition that developed from the Enlightenment, including the need to rigorously articulate science and faith, history and truth, etc.

Nevertheless, it did not succeed in finding answers to the new questions posed to believers in a world that was “shifting terribly,”, argues Henri-Jérôme Gagey, a former dean at the Catholic Institute of Paris, with reference to the consequences of the technological revolution and globalization.

Influenced by the French moral theologian, Xavier Thévenot (1938-2004), Gagey believes that, in

responding to the current “anthropological revolution”, theology needs to display “clinical responsibility”.

In other words, it needs to place itself at the service of “a process of discernment that is attentive to health, upright spiritual attitudes, and ecclesial practices”.

Does this amount to theology as a field hospital? In a similar vein, Philippe Vallin, professor of systematic theology at the University of Strasbourg, has invited people to “correctly interpret the ‘Pope Francis’ moment”.

“Many people only considered Chapter 8 of *Amoris Laetitia* from a dogmatic point of view, whether divorced and remarried people should have access to the sacraments,” Vallin says.

“Yet the great strength of the text lies in the weight that it gives to its registration of a narrative that imitates the way in which Jesus led his disciples to the truth,” he continued, noting the convergence of recent work by exegetes and liturgy specialists on this issue.

“Theology, which is now less exclusively speculative, thus has a role in unifying other aspects of ecclesial life by giving value to lived experience. The reader of *Amoris Laetitia* is called, not as an external subject, but from his position in the family,” Vallin adds.

France, according to Vallin, is particularly well placed in this respect.

“In a highly secularized country, theology has a capacity to listen to contemporary requests and to enter into dialogue with society,” he says, noting the academic exchanges between theologians and specialists in other disciplines.

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